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Variability of Rhoticity in Czech Speakers of English

Variabilita roticity u českých mluvčích angličtiny

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PROHLÁŠENÍ

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to contribute to the description of contemporary Czech foreign accent in English by examining Czech learners´ rhoticity, a substantial accent feature. Rhoticity is addressed both from a phonological and a phonetic perspective, and its variability under the influence of different factors is investigated. The theoretical part presents rhoticity and its various aspects in present day´s accents of English, and its dimensions related to second language acquisition. The research part analyses rhoticity both in Czech university students of English, with respect to their accent-preferences, and in Czech non-students of English. The results show a distinct and consistent inclination to rhoticity in less proficient learners, a lower degree of consistency and dependence on accent models in students of English, a high capability of especially younger Czech learners to realise the rhotic contexts in a standard manner, and certain noticeable tendencies dependent on the critical /r/-phoneme´s position in syllable.

Key words: rhoticity, foreign accent, language transfer, L2 learner, accents of English, pronunciation model

Abstrakt

Cílem této práce je přispět k popisu současného českého cizineckého přízvuku v angličtině zkoumáním roticity, podstatného znaku akcentů angličtiny, u českých mluvčích. Práce se věnuje roticitě z fonologického i fonetického hlediska a zkoumá její variabilitu pod vlivem různých faktorů. Teoretická část představuje roticitu s jejími rozličnými aspekty v současných akcentech angličtiny a její rozměry týkající se osvojování cizího jazyka. Výzkumná část rozebírá roticitu jak u českých univerzitních studentů angličtiny, s ohledem na jejich preference v oblasti akcentů, tak u mluvčích nestudujících angličtinu jako vysokoškolský obor. Výsledky ukazují výrazný a konzistentní sklon k roticitě u méně kompetentních mluvčích, menší stupeň konzistence a závislost na vzorových aktencech u studentů angličtiny, vysokou schopnost obzvláště mladších mluvčích realizovat rotické kontexty standardním způsobem a jisté patrné tendence závislé na pozici příslušného fonému /r/ v rámci slabiky.

Klíčová slova: roticita, cizinický přízvuk, jazykový transfer, student cizího jazyka, akcenty angličtiny, vzor výslovnosti

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1. Introduction

There are myriads of different accents of the English language; they can be differentiated on the macroscopic level of big national standards, as well as on the microscopic level of every individual speaker´s accent, native or non-native. The accents are a fascinating, dynamic phenomenon, as they undergo changes in time, they influence every speaker´s image in the eyes (or rather ears) of other speakers, and their number inevitably grows alongside the growing community of English speakers around the globe. The accents can differ in a multitude of particular aspects, but one feature can be immediately distinguished in all of them; a feature readily noticeable, as it is based on a simple binary opposition between presence and absence of a phoneme in specific contexts: rhoticity. It attracts all the more attention since the standard accents of the two most influential English speaking cultures in today´s world, British and American, diverge in this very aspect.

The rapidly increasing prominence of English as an international language naturally provokes research in the area of its foreign accents. Rhoticity as an accent feature is so elementary and crucial that it deserves to be thoroughly investigated in every foreign accent of English, including the Czech one.

The basic assumption that Czech accent is typically rhotic might seem rather self-evident, but it is also the variability of rhoticity that needs to be examined, i.e. the way in which rhoticity (and the speakers´ consistency in producing it) is influenced by various factors; proficiency of the learners, their attitude to different English accents and Anglophone cultures, specific environments in which the critical phoneme might appear, or relevant features of Czech pertaining to rhoticity that may be transferred into L2 English. This is what this thesis will attempt to investigate, both in very advanced, mildly accented learners (university students of English), and in "ordinary," markedly Czech-accented intermediate learners. The theoretical part is dedicated to description of diverse aspects and dimensions of rhoticity in English, and to its pertinence to Czech learners specifically. The research part, then, experimentally examines rhoticity in 24 Czech learners, and deduces their collective and individual tendencies with respect to different factors.

2. Systematic considerations

2.1 Transcription

In this text, *italics* will be used to respresent conventional spelling, / / for phonemic transcriptions and [ ] for phonetic and allophonic transcriptions, as commonly used in Wells (1982), Machač, Skarnitzl (2009), Hansen Edwards, Zampini (2008), Reed, Levis (2015), and other publications cited in this work.

2.2 What is rhoticity

Rhoticity will be primarily referred to on the phonological level; the phoneme /r/ is excluded from non-prevocalic environments in non-rhotic accents, but present in those positions (i.e. pre-vocalic, pre-consonantal and pre-pausal) in rhotic accents. (Cruttenden 2014, 86). To say "non-prevocalic environments" is perhaps more appropritate than to say "syllabic nuclei and codas," because of the existence of the so-called linking /r/ in non-rhotic accents, in which /r/ indeed does appear in absolute-final positions within syllables, but only in case of sandhi with a word beginning with a vowel, e.g. *far away* pronounced as /fɑːrəweɪ/. On the other hand, elision can cause the occurrence of pre-consonantal /r/ in non-rhotic accents, for example *carol* pronounced as /kærl̩/ (Ibid.).

As for English and Czech, we can also address the phoneme´s correspondence to spelling. In Czech, *r* regularly corresponds to /r/. This is not the case in non-rhotic English; the phonological rule of excluding /r/ from non-prevocalic positions prevents concordance between e.g. *sort* and /sɔːt/. Apart from that, the phenomenon of so-called intrusive /r/ exists in non-rhotic accents, i.e. prevocalic /r/-insertion which is (unlike linking /r/) not supported in ortography, e.g. *idea of* pronounced as /aɪˈdɪərəv/. It is often criticised (Cruttenden 2014, 316), but accepted as a decided feature of the RP standard (Upton 2012, 64). In comparison, *r* in rhotic English corresponds regularly to /r/ as in Czech, except for instances of hyper-rhoticity, i.e. word-final /r/-insertion not based in spelling, which furthermore (as opposed to instrusive /r/) does not happen in sandhi, for example *China* pronounced as /tʃaɪnə˞/ (Wells 1982, 76). Examples of the differences between a non-rhotic (RP) and a rhotic (GA) pronunciation in selected

contexts are listed in Table 1.

An area that inevitably pertains to the "variability of rhoticity" is, of course, also the phoneme´s phonetic realisation, i.e. the sound assigned to it in speech (see 3.1).

2.3 Phonemic and phonetic level

Concerning the relation of the phoneme /r/ and the grapheme *r* to their phonetic realisations, one important issue must be addressed here.

Those who decide to approach rhoticity from a generative perspective can consider the phoneme /r/ to be always present underlyingly in all accents (Wells 1982, 71) and to be regularly deleted or vocalised in non-rhotic accents only on the surface, i.e. phonetic level. (Ibid., 76). This, in effect, would mean that /fɑ:/ in non-rhotic RP is the surface representation of underlying /fɑ:r/. Such approach could be advocated for English e.g. on the basis of non-rhoticity´s historical development, during which the realisation of /r/ was weakened gradually (see 3.2). Nevertheless, this understanding is by no means universally accepted; Wells, for example, discards it, although he admits that such view can be more natural for native rhotic speakers (Ibid.).

For the purposes of this work, I shall follow Wells´s approach in comprehending the difference between /stɑ:t/ and /stɑ:rt/ "as one of phonotactic distribution, and therefore a difference in underlying representation" (Ibid., 81), i.e. a phonological difference. This decision can be also argued for on the basis of existing minimal pairs such as "ah" (interjection) and "r" (the name of the letter), which are distinguished in rhotic pronunciation as /ɑ:/ and /ɑ:r/, but coincide in RP. Another possible argument in favour of this approach is the existence of the intrusive /r/ phenomenon, in which underlying r-less forms are subject to /r/-insertion rule (see Wells 1982, 71). Therefore, the difference between [fɔ:ɹ] and [fɔ:ɾ] will be treated in this text as allophonic (different realisations of /r/, both rhotic), whereas the difference between /fɔ:/ and /fɔ:r/ as a phonological one. However, for methodical purposes, the analysis in the practical part of this work keeps /r/ as the underlying phoneme in all cases (see 6.2).

Yet another decision has to be made on the phonemic level, which pertains to the

syllabic nuclei: a) in the monosyllabic word *first,* and b) the unstressed syllable in *teacher.* In RP (referential non-rhotic accent), the phonemic transcription of these words is unambiguous: a) /fɜ:st/ and b) /ti:tʃə/, i.e. the positions in the syllabic nuclei are occupied by mid central vowels. For GA (referential rhotic accent), approaches to transcribing these syllables are unequivocal. Wells decides to use two phonemes to represent the nuclei, a) /ɜr/ and b) /ər/, based on its parallelism with /ɑr/ and /ɔr/, i.e. an analogy within the rhotic accent (Wells 1982, 121). Another perspective, though, can be drawn upon the interaccentual analogy with the non-rhotic accents, that is a) /ɝː/ and b) /ɚ/ can be used as r-coloured (see Machač 2017, 2) counterparts to the RP central vowels. The consideration that in GA, r-colouring is usually spread throughout the vowel (Wells 1982, 121; Boberg 2015, 232) is in favour of the latter approach. Yet another possibility is employing a syllabic /ɻ̩/ in both of these nuclei, which, however, does not reflect the difference in length. In this case, I shall combine the approaches by preferring the /ɝː/ and /ɚ/ in phonemic transcriptions of GA in the text, while in the practical analysis, /ɜr/ and /ər/ will be the phonemic representations of the syllabic nuclei, and [ɝː] and [ɚ] the details in their phonetic realisations, perceptually different from the two-segment sequences [ɜɹ] and [əɹ] (see 6.2).

word	**context**	**RP**	**GA**
red	onset, stressed syllable	/ˈred/	/ˈred/
sultry	onset, unstressed syllable	/ˈsʌltri/	/ˈsʌltri/
far	coda, stressed syllable	/ˈfɑ:/	/ˈfɑ:r/
import (n.)	coda, unstressed syllable	/ˈɪmpɔ:t/	/ˈɪmpɔ:rt/
world	nucleus, stressed syllable	/ˈwɜ:ld/	/ˈwɝ:ld/
chapter	nucleus, unstressed syllable	/ˈtʃæptə/	/ˈtʃæptɚ/
far away	no linking	/ˈfɑ: ʔəˈweɪ/	/ˈfɑ:r ʔəˈweɪ/
	linking	/ˈfɑ:rəweɪ/*	/ˈfɑ:rəweɪ/*
idea of	no linking	/aɪˈdɪə ʔəv/	/aɪˈdɪə ʔəv/
	intrusive /r/	/aɪˈdɪərəv/ **	---
governor	standard	/ˈgʌvənə/	/ˈgʌvɚnɚ/
	R dissimilation	---	/ˈgʌvənɚ/ **
China	standard	/ˈtʃaɪnə/	/ˈtʃaɪnə/
	hyperrhoticity	---	/ˈtʃaɪnɚ/ **

* the sameness of the forms is due to linking /r/ in RP, as opposed to /r/-resyllabification in GA
** not systemic; may be viewed as a substandard pronunciation

Table 1: *Differences between a non-rhotic (RP) and a rhotic (GA) pronunciation in selected contexts. The examplary words have been chosen so that their phonemic transcriptions in the two accents do not differ in other features than rhoticity.*

3. Rhoticity in English

Rhoticity is one of the most readily recognisable features of English accents and the division between rhotic and non-rhotic accents is fundamental (Wells 1982, 75) in distinguishing English accent types. Therefore, the question of rhoticity is inseparably connected to the problematics of accents, national standards, and their sociolinguistic dimensions. Historical development of rhoticity has to be briefly summarised, too.

3.1 Rhoticity within accents of English

Rhoticity predominates in North America, including Canada and GA, is the norm in Scotland, Ireland, some parts of Wales (Upton 2015, 258), and even certain western parts of England (Wells 1982, 76). Non-rhoticity is typical of English of the southern hemisphere, namely in Australia, New Zealand (Bauer 2015, 281), South Africa (Bekker, Van Rooy 2015, 295), certain regions of the USA (Boberg 2015, 234), obviously RP (Upton 2015, 256), and most of England and Wales (Brown 2015, 97).

Of course rhoticity can vary within particular accents; we have semi-rhotic accents, such as Jamaican (Wells 1982, 76) or broad white South-African (Bekker, Van Rooy 2015, 292). Semi-rhoticity seems to be a recent trend even in Scottish English, in which many speakers treat pre-pausal and pre-consonantal /r/ differently (Cruttenden 2014, 89). Elements of variation can be found also within accents otherwise distinctly rhotic or non-rhotic, for example R dissimilation in GA, which "affects ortographic *r* in unstressed non-final syllables adjacent to /r/ in another syllable," i.e. words like *surprise* can be pronounced /səˈpraɪz/ instead of the canonical /sɚˈpraɪz/ (Wells 1982, 490; see also Table 1). Inconsistencies on the level of individual speakers´ accents, then, will be one of the concerns of my research in this work.

A number of allophones can represent /r/ in English, apart from [ɹ] also [ɾ] and [r] (see 4.3.1 and 4.3.2). A notable case is the [w] or [ʋ] articulation of /r/, which can lead to homophony, losing the distinction between *wed* and *red*; it can be a characteristic feature of certain accents, but at the same time "has often been regarded as a speech defect in adults" (Cruttenden 2014, 225). For our purposes, it

is important to mention that nowadays, /r/ in English is realised predominantly as some kind of approximant, be it alveolar, post-alveolar, or retroflex. Approximants prevail on the British Isles (Upton 2015, 259), including even contemporary Scottish English (Neřodlová 2013, 32), but also in in GA (Wells 1982, 490), predominantly also in RP (see 4.3.2), in Australia (Bauer 2015, 281), etc. The standard form of /r/ in the sound inventory of contemporary English is generally listed as a post-alveolar approximant [ɹ] (Cruttenden 2014, 29; Deterding 2015, 74).

3.2 Historical development of rhoticity

Varieties of Old English (OE) seem to have been rhotic (Smith 2009, 15), as reflected also in OE spelling, which was largely phonologically based (Murray 2017, 52) and in which *r* (and therefore also /r/) could stand in non-prevocalic positions, even form syllabic nuclei (Ibid., 61). The same applies to Middle English (ME), in which there were no "silent letters" (Horobin, Smith 2002, 49), i.e. every *r* in spelling was always pronounced. Already by the 15th century, that is with the emergence of Early Modern English (EME), the /r/-loss sporadically began (Lass 1999, 115). By the end of the 18th century, that is in Late Modern English (LME), the establishment of full non-rhoticity in the Southern English standard was more or less completed (Ibid., 115-116). Nevertheless, there have been some remnants of rhoticity reported even in the 19th century SE standard, as for example a diphtongal realisation [ɑə] of the vowel in *arms*, or several documented instances of rhotic pronunciation by educated speakers (MacMahon 1998, 474-475).

Phonetic details of the phoneme´s realisation in the history of English seem to be more difficult to reconstruct. Murray lists OE /r/ as alveolar (Murray 2017, 58) and mentions the possibility of its velarised variant in codas (Ibid., 57). Lass is convinced also about the existence of a historical pharyngeal coarticulation (in addition to the velar one), and lists the basic form as an alveolar or post-alveolar approximant, claiming that the notion of early /r/ being a trill is unsupported (Lass 1999, 108). To further complicate the issue, /r/ probably also had strong and weak (postvocalic) allophones during the process of derhotacisation, particularly in the

17th century (Ibid., 115).

As non-rhoticity originated in the SE standard and was completed as late as by the 1790s, it obviously did not penetrate all the varieties which had already been at existence by that time. Scotland, which "had developed its semi-independent standard before 1603" (Görlach 1999, 468), has remained rhotic. The anglicisation of Ireland was complicated, and "from Cromwell onwards had non-standard English input" (Ibid., 469). North American colonies have been always fragmented in terms of accents, although "colonial levelling" took place (Ibid., 469), but the original colonial accents of North American English remained unaffected by the innovation of non-rhoticity (Boberg 2015, 234); neither the non-rhotic SE nor later RP were ever universally accepted as the American standard, even though the standard known as General American emerged as late as in the 20th century (McMahon 1998, 402). Australian English, on the hand, is non-rhotic, because the land was colonised relatively late, and the accent "carries forward trends (...) present in (...) the south-east of England in the early nineteenth century" (Wells 1982, 593).

3.3 Sociolinguistic dimensions of rhoticity

Wells mentions that "within the American cultural framework, a non-rhotic pronunciation is perceived as slovenly or ugly," whereas in England "non pre-vocalic /r/ is readily perceived as rustic, even comic" (Wells 1982, 35). In spite of the datedness of Wells´s book and his perhaps too expressive use of attributes in describing the stigma, it has not become history yet. Though it has to be acknowledged that "pleas for more linguistic tolerance" have recently arisen as a reaction to the dynamism and variation within language standards (Hickey 2012, 25) and even RP has reportedly become understood as profoundly accented (Mugglestone 2015, 32), "the perceptual legacies of the past can linger on" (Ibid.). Speakers of the codified varieties still show prescriptivism, both overtly and covertly (Hickey 2012, 22), and standards continue to be used as the manifestation of correct language and a medium for education (Ibid., 23). Rhoticity or non-rhoticity, as an elementary characteristic of every accent, is obviously an integral part of this.

The social significance of rhoticity, based on its status in the respective prestigeous standard (in this specific case, the form assumed as "correct" by NYC speakers at the particular time), has been famously documented in Labov´s experiment in the New York City department stores, in which it was confirmed that "any groups of New York speakers (...) ranked on a scale of social stratification (...) will be ranked in the same order by their differential use of /r/" (Labov 2006 [1966], 38). Although Labov´s experiment was carried out in the 1960s and pertained only to a geographically (not socially) limited community of speakers, its ascertainment about the social significance of rhoticity is relevant in general. The fact that in the 19th century, the situation was quite opposite in the eastern part of the United States, and non-rhotic pronunciation enjoyed prestige there because of its association with RP (Labov, Ash, Boberg 2006, 47), confirms mutability of standards, but also further proves the prominent position rhoticity has had in the sociolinguistics of English.

We can therefore conclude that speaking in a rhotic or non-rhotic manner is an important and defining feature of every individual English speaker´s accent, which influences his or her image in different situations, social and geographical contexts, be it (rhoticity) the speaker´s deliberate decision, based on cultural and aesthetic preferences, a feature acquired due to dominant exposure to a particular accent, due to having been taught a particular standard at school, or an inherent feature of their foreign accent, determined by transfer of their L1 feature into L2. The possible influences on the variability of rhoticity in Czech learners of L2 English will be discussed in the following section.

4. Czech speakers and rhoticity

4.1 Rhoticity at Czech schools

Received pronunciation, a non-rhotic accent, is used as the "preferred accent in the education systems of both Germany and Argentina" (Upton 2012, 69). These two particular countries are obviously not listed haphazardly, but in order to illustrate the prominence this accent still enjoys in TEFL worldwide, in spite of the current "cultural dominance of the United States within the English speaking

world" (Ibid.). Especially in the European countries, RP has been traditionally chosen as the default pronunciation model for meeting the criterion of geo-cultural proximity (Kobák 2017, 16), and it is the predominant form of pronunciation featured in the educational materials on the European market (Ivanová 2011, 75). Although the Czech curriculum for grammar schools *Rámcový vzdělávací program pro gymnázia* (2007, 16-17)[1] does not explicitly prioritise any accent or variety, Ivanová suggests "BBC pronunciation" (understand RP) as the model for production of speech in Czech elementary and secondary schooling (Ivanová 2011, 70), primarily because of the European context, and because of the accent´s alleged pertinence to the aims of the Czech curriculum.

This being said, it may appear surprising that non-rhoticity is reported to cause difficulties to Czech learners in understanding spoken language (Kobák 2017, 62); after all, they are supposed to be exposed to a non-rhotic accent in language classrooms. Given that (apart from exceptional cases) perception tends to be regularly better than production, which applies not only to L2 but even to L1 acquisition (Major 2008, 75), this finding seems to go directly against Ivanová´s suggestion of a non-rhotic accent as a production model for Czech learners. The learner´s proficiency is also reported to have an impact on his or her comprehending non-rhotic English speech; more proficient respondents experience less difficulties (Kobák 2017, 49).

Other data, moderately supporting the notion of non-rhoticity being perceptually problematic for Czech learners, especially at lower levels, can be also found in Jakšič (2018). Czech secondary school students voted GA, a rhotic accent, to be slightly more comprehensible than Southern English (a non-rhotic accent, historically related to the RP standard). Although, obviously, other factors than rhoticity are at play in this case, two of the three most incomprehensible accents for both secondary school students and university students of English were also non-rhotic: North English and Australian (Jakšič 2018, 52). The possible reasons why non-rhoticity seems to be difficult for Czech speakers both to perceive and to produce will be addressed in (4.3).

Last but not least, the role of teachers as pronunciation models is not negligible.

1 available at http://www.nuv.cz/file/159

Ivanová´s reasearch about Czech university students of TEFL reports that not even 30% of them strived for native-like pronunciation (Ivanová 2011, 186), and on average they had moderately strong Czech accent, specifically 3,57 on the scale from 1 (strongest) to 5 (mildest) (Ibid., 210). Despite being unable (and mostly not even attempting) to produce it without Czech accent, 62% of these future teachers have chosen RP as their preferred pronunciation model (Ibid., 207), which suggests that the non-rhotic standard is to stay in Czech language classrooms for a while. And not only Czech; teachers´ preferences for RP have been reported also in other countries (Walker, Zoghbor 2015, 449), in spite of the proponents of ELF recommending rhoticity (which reflects spelling and thus increases intelligibility) for teaching purposes (Ibid., 441).

4.2 Accent and Czech learners

The question whether to strive for a native-like accent or not, and which one, is given still more and more attention with the growing internationality of English. On the one hand, foreign accents tend to be viewed negatively (Moyer 2013, 14) and "sounding identifiably non-native might have negative consequences insofar as it triggers assumptions in the listener's mind about other traits" (Ibid., 85); in other words, it simply leads to prejudice, supported by various stereotypes, such as stereotypical depiction of foreign accents in media (see Ibid., 111). On the other hand, the view of ELF clearly prioritises intelligibility over accent (Walker, Zoghbor 2015, 436), and some are even convinced that losing foreign accent in L2 could endanger one´s identity (see McCrocklin and Link 2016, 127).

Czech learners, nevertheless, seem to be concerned neither with their linguistic identity in L2, nor with the ELF approach (Brabcová, Skarnitzl 2016, 38). Reportedly, 70% of young Czech learners who are not university students of English and use the language to communicate mostly with non-native speakers still wish to acquire a native-like accent; mostly General British (Ibid.), which means non-rhotic. Such preference corresponds also to the findings that non-rhotic Southern English seems to be the most pleasant-sounding accent to Czech students (Jakšič 2018, 54), and that Czech students find British English more prestigeous than American (Jakšič, Šturm 2017, 353).

This, again, reveals the paradox of Czech learners being more fond of a non-rhotic accent, which, to them, is more difficult to understand, leave alone production. It could indicate that RP nowadays, gradually losing even its traditionally strong position in media in the English-speaking world (Mugglestone 2015, 32), might be more popular with non-native speakers of English than at home. Preference for RP is also documented for example in Danish learners (Ladegaard, Sachev 2006, 91) or Spanish learners (Carrie 2017, 427).

To be objective, though, it has to be acknowledged that GA is also in high esteem among Czech learners, ranking together with RP very high in comprehensibility, status, pleasantness, and model suitability (Jakšič 2018, 70). It is therefore these two national standards that enjoy the most prestige, both for different reason, one rhotic and the other non-rhotic. As for SLA, non-rhotic RP still seems to have the upper hand.

4.3 Rhoticity and influence of L1 Czech on L2 English

4.3.1 Czech /r/ vs. English /r/

As one would expect, one of the assumable conditions is that "learners of English tend to be rhotic (in English) if their native language allows syllable final /r/" (Brown 2015, 98). Since it is necessary to begin every investigation of transfer with at least cursory description of the phenomenon at task in the L1 of the learners (Major 2008, 82), a few words should be said about the Czech /r/, and a brief comparison with the English /r/ made on the principle of contrastive analysis.

In terms of its phonotactic distribution, Czech /r/ can occur in three positions within a syllable: non-syllabic (both in onsets and codas), syllabic, and semi-syllabic[2] (Machač 2017, 3). Whereas the last of the three contexts does not exist in English, the other two are relevant for our purposes, as they are shared with the rhotic accents of English. In other words, Czech /r/ does appear in syllabic codas and nuclei, like in the rhotic and unlike in the non-rhotic accents of English. We can also say the possible phonotactic distribution of /r/ in rhotic English is a

2 In Czech "pobočněslabičné;" it constitutes the first and more sonorous element in the syllabic onset at the beginning of a word, e.g. *rty* (Machač 2017, 3).

subset (lacking the semi-syllabic context) of the possible distribution in Czech. This should suffice to conclude that Czech is a rhotic language, in which "/r/ is pronounced whenever it appears in spelling" (Kobák 2017, 14). In Czech, though, /r/ is always reflected in spelling as *r* (except for some loan names like *Rhona*), whereas English has got four possible ortographic representations: *r*, *rr*, *wr* and *rh* (Cruttenden 2014, 223).

In terms of its phonetic realisation, cotemporary Czech speakers pronounce /r/ predominantly as an alveolar flap [ɾ], that is a single tap of the tongue against the alveolar ridge (Machač 2017, 15). Although alveolar trill [r] with more vibrations remains an option in Czech, it is synchronically considered exceptional, and conditioned by expressivity and individual style in most cases (Ibid., 14). This is a situation somewhat reminiscent of Scottish English, in which [r] is also a possible allophone (Cruttenden 2014, 226; Neřoldová 2013, 32), but reported to have been dying out already in the 1930s (Wells 1982, 411). Even in other accents on the British Isles, [r] can still be heard, but only in highly stylised speech (Cruttenden 2014, 224), similarly as in Czech.

4.3.2 Transfer of /r/

When speaking of the transfer of Czech /r/ and [ɾ] into L2 English, we should distinguish between the transfer of "abstract" underlying structures and the "surface" transfer of sounds (Major 2008, 68). Transfer of the phonotactics of the Czech /r/, i.e. phonological rhoticity, should be understood as the former kind (see 2.3), also because of the Czech phoneme´s regular correspondence to ortography which is an abstract representation itself (Ibid., 69). The transfer of Czech [ɾ] into L2 English is the latter type, as "(s)ounds in the L1 and L2 are related perceptually to one another at a position-sensitive allophonic level, rather than a more abstract phonemic level" (Flege 1995, 239; quoted by Major 2008, 69).

Transfer is more likely to happen if the phenomena are similar in both languages (Major 2008, 72). For the phoneme /r/, the condition of similarity is fulfilled by a) its identical representation in the spelling systems of both the languages, and b) the overlap of its phonotactic distributions in Czech and in rhotic English (see 4.3.1). Obviously, this can be called a phonological "transfer" only if the target L2 is non-rhotic; or, more accurately, this would be a case of positive transfer (Major

2008, 81) for a rhotic target accent, and interference (Walker, Zoghbor 2015, 446) for a non-rhotic target accent. But let us remind ourselves that non-rhotic RP is the common pronunciation model at Czech schools, and Czech learners prefer it (see 4.1, 4.2).

As for the sounds [ɾ] and [ɹ], the similarities are the following: a) they typically represent the phoneme /r/ and grapheme *r* in both of the respective languages, and b) they are both members of the group of rhotic sounds, i.e. possible /r/ realisations (Machač 2017, 2). Therefore, the Czech phone [ɾ] is also a suitable candidate for transfer.

For objectivity´s sake, it has to be mentioned that several sources list the alveolar flap [ɾ] to be a valid allophone of the post-alveolar approximant [ɹ] in English (Cruttenden 2014, 224; Major 2008, 69; Wells 1982, 282); markedly as one of the several possible /r/ allophones of Scottish English (Cruttenden 2014, 226; Neřoldová 2013, 32; Wells 1982, 411), in the working-class accent of Liverpool (Cruttenden 2014, 226; Wells 1982, 75), but also in RP, especially in consonant clusters immediately after the voiceless dental fricative [θ] and in an intervocalic position after a stressed vowel (Cruttenden 2014, 224; Wells 1982, 46, 282). However, this is typical of the so-called "upper-class RP" and reported as rare in mainstream RP even by the 1980s (Wells 1982, 282), except perhaps the [θɾ] cluster, which is more widespread possibly because of its articulatory convenience; the dental and alveolar places of articulation are simply closer to each other than dental and post-alveolar. In spite of its old-fashionedness and sociolectal specificity, the existence of the allophone [ɾ] in RP makes it dubious to make any decision about the flap´s "incorrect" or "non-native-like" nature when used by Czech learnes. Nevertheless, vast majority of Czech learners (unless they are extremely advanced) cannot be seriously suspected of using it for stylistic purposes, or because of any conscious accent preference; it will not be far from the truth to assume their flaps to be a result of phonetic transfer almost exclusively.

4.3.3 Factors against transfer

Expectably, the main factors decreasing the likelihood of transfer are lower age and more experience (Major 2008, 71). As for experience, the simple rule "the

more L2 use, the less foreign accent" applies (Ibid.). As for age, the Critical Period Hypothesis is especially relevant and supported by an extensive body of studies (Trofimovich, Kennedy, Foote 2015, 354); a general formulation of the principle behind it can be that "the degree to which a foreign accents manifests (in L2) is influenced primarily by the age at which (second) language acquisition began" (Ioup 2008, 57). These two factors must by definition operate independently on each other, which means that a late-onset older speaker with more experience may possibly have milder foreign accent than an early-onset speaker with less experience, and vice versa.

A factor which could also hypothetically work against the phonological transfer of rhoticity from L1 Czech to L2 English is minimising articulatory effort: pronouncing *more* as /mɔ:/ should be easier than pronouncing /mɔ:r/, because the latter form features an extra sound (Wells 1982, 95).

It also has to be mentioned that the Czech /r/ can be realised with zero flapping in non-careful speech (Machač 2017, 14), but such pronunciation is substandard, not regular and systemic in contemporary Czech, and therefore not likely to lead to a "positive transfer" into the L2 phonetic structure.

4.3.4 Conclusion

The challenge the English /r/ poses to Czech learners is therefore twofold; firstly, its realisation as a post-alveolar approximant [ɹ] – a phonetic concern, and secondly, its production or "non-production" in other than prevocalic contexts – a phonological concern (see 2.3). Needless to say that the issue of the phonetic realization of /r/ is not disposed of by chosing non-rhotic RP as the model pronunciation, since the phoneme is still standardly supposed to be realised as an approximant in the remaining, that is prevocalic contexts. In other words, "if a Czech learner of English wishes to acquire an RP-like non-rhotic accent, they need to make twice the effort to succeed" (Kobák 2017, 14), as far as /r/ is concerned.

5. Hypotheses

Based on the theoretical overview, these assumptions about rhoticity in L1 Czech learners of L2 English can be made:

1) The advantage of rhotic speakers aspiring for non-rhoticity is the fact that the /r/-deletion rule can be generalised for non-prevocalic positions (Wells 1982, 114). Therefore, Czech university students of English striving for a non-rhotic accent (group A-nr, see 6.4.2) will be mostly consistent in their non-rhoticity.

2) Czech university students of English striving for a rhotic accent (group A-r, see 6.4.2) will be even more consistent (in their rhoticity), because they do not have to apply any phonological rule for /r/ whatsoever (see 4.3.1).

3) Czech university students of English who do not have chosen any model accent (group A-in, see 6.4.2) will be the most inconsistent among the groups listed so far, and will be mostly rhotic, as it is more convenient for native speakers of Czech.

4) Non-students of English (group B, see 6.4.1) will display more influence of transfer; therefore, they will be mostly rhotic, and alveolar flaps [ɾ] as realisation ("Czech /r/") will be more frequent than in university students of English.

5) In non-students of English, [ɾ] will appear more frequently in syllabic onsets than in the target (non-prevocalic) contexts.

6. Method

24 native speakers of Czech were recorded reading aloud a text in English – short radio news taken over from the BBC in London (see Appendix 1). Although reading aloud is clearly not spontaneous speech, it has got many advantages for our purposes. Quality recordings could be taken in a soundproof studio, which facilitated the analysis. The speakers had several minutes to pre-read the text, which enhanced fluency and contributed to minimising hesitations, slips of the tongue, and incorrect pronunciations of longer words. As an inherent characteristic of reading aloud, the speech was generally slower and more careful than in casual conversation, which also made the analysis easier. But most importantly, reading the same text, all the speakers could produce the same number of relevant contexts (with exceptions discussed in 6.1.2).

6.1 Contexts

In the text there were 74 contexts pertaining to rhoticity, i.e. contexts in which /r/ could appear in non-prevocalic positions. Some words contained two such contexts (e.g. *forward*, *border*, *headquarters*), and some words (types) repeated in the text. In total, there were 53 target words-types,[3] 71 target words-tokens, and 74 non-prevocalic contexts (tokens) which were analysed in each speaker´s recording; that constitutes 1776 contexts in the entire corpus.

6.1.1 Position within syllable

Out of the 74 target contexts:

- 27 contexts featured potential /r/ in syllabic codas (post-vocalic) in stressed syllables (type: /ˈtʃɑːdʒ/ - non rhotic, /ˈtʃɑːrdʒ/ - rhotic). Grammatical words, such as *for*, were also included in this group (based on the full form).
- 4 contexts featured potential /r/ in syllabic codas (post-vocalic) in unstressed syllables (type: /ˈriːsɔːsɪz/ vs. /ˈriːsɔːrsɪz/; nobody in the corpus pronounced the alternative /rɪˈzɔːsɪz/).
- 10 contexts featured potential /r/ in syllabic nuclei in stressed syllables

3 I counted *their*/*there* or *four*/*for* as different types, regardless of their possibly homophonous pronunciations, but *government*/*governments* as the same type, and also *reports*(noun)/*reports*(verb) as the same type, because the stress is placed identically in both.

(type: /ˈwɜːld/ vs. /ˈwɝːld/).

– 33 contexts featured potential /r/ in syllabic nuclei in unstressed syllables (type: /ˈtʃæptə/ vs. /ˈtʃæptɚ/).

This typology, however, is rather theoretical; in reality, the speakers often shifted the stress, or inserted a vowel, for example said /ˈtʃɑpter/, and therefore the phoneme´s position within the syllable immediately changed. Nonetheless, such contexts were kept in the corpus (see 6.2), only reclassified (see 7.2), given that the non-prevocalic nature of the context is more important for our purposes than the specific syllable-positional detail.

Possible instances of intrusive /r/ or hyperrhoticity (see 2.2) did not have to be dealt with, as these are not reflected in ortography and therefore could not be present in the selected contexts. If R dissimilation (see 3.1) occurred, the pronunciation in the critical context was treated as non-rhotic.

6.1.2 Excluded contexts

For obvious reasons, certain contexts could not be included in the analysis. One of them is linking, since forms such as /jɪroʊld/ (*year-old*) or /kəˈmændərɪn/ (*commander in*) are not characteristic of either non-rhotic or rhotic accents; it can be an instance of linking /r/ in the former, and of resyllabification of word-final /r/ in the latter (see Table 1). However, if the speaker separated the words by a glottal stop, the context could be counted in, i.e. /jɪr ʔoʊld/ was analysed as an instance of rhoticity, whereas /jɪə ʔoʊld/ as an instance of non-rhoticity.

Another unpredictable factor was mispronunciation; some speakers shifted stress in certain target words, significantly changed the quality of vowels, even omitted entire syllables, etc. As regards words more or less mispronounced, the crucial condition is that the target context remain non-prevocalic; for example, if the speaker (hypothetically) pronounced *interview* as /ɪntəˈrevjuː/, the context would have to be excluded. The pronunciation of certain grammatical words is also unpredictable, as so-called "weak forms" could be employed by more experienced speakers. In this case, no contexts were excluded, and rhoticity was simply analysed according to the phonetic reality, which means /fɔː/ and /fə/ as non-rhotic, /fɔːr/ and /fɚ/ as rhotic.

Certain proper names were also excluded, such as the Russian surname *Gorshkov*, because the speaker could pronounce it on the principles of loan phonology (see Major 2008, 68). Nevertheless, surnames of English provenance, such as *Curness*, *Marshall* or *Bartlett*, were kept in the corpus, and so were certain commonly known and anglicised geographical names, such as *Kashmir*.

6.2. The analysis of rhoticity

6.2.1 Non-prevocalic contexts

The recordings were analysed in Praat (Boersma & Weenink, 2014). Segmental boundaries in the target words were aligned, using the segmentation guidelines described in Machač, Skarnitzl (2009). There were 7 tiers with textual information appended to each of the recordings, containing: 1) the written text given to the speakers to read, 2) the ortographic representations of each word of the text, 3) canonical lexical stress in the target words, 4) actual lexical stress in the target words (as pronounced by the speakers), 5) the phonetic transcription of the target words, 6) the phonemic transcription of the target words. Rhoticity was evaluated in the seventh, separate tier named "target." The evaluation was delivered primarily on perceptual basis, with additional visual checking in the spectrogram.

As already mentioned in (2.3), for methodical purposes, the underlying phoneme /r/ was always kept in the tier with phonemic transcription, regardless of whether the pronunciation in the particular cotext was rhotic or non-rhotic; this enabled to evaluate rhoticity on the simple binary principle "present/non-present." Five basic categories, then, were distinguished in the evaluation and marked above the phoneme in the critical environment, based on the surface realisation:

- "0" for non-rhoticity, i.e. either /r/-deletion rule was applied (sequences such as [ˈʧɑːdʒ], [ˈɪmpɔːt]), or vocalic realisation by a non-rhotic mid central vowel ([ˈwɜːld], [ˈfə]).
- "rv" for rhotic vowels, i.e. mid central vowel with r-colouring spread throughout, as in GA ([ˈfɝːst], [ˈʧæptɚ]).
- "ap" for approximants (alveolar, post-alveolar, retroflex), if they were preceded by a vowel distinguishable as a separate segment (e.g. [ˈɪmpɔːɹt],

but also for example [pəɹˈsweɪd] as opposed to [pɚˈsweɪd], see 2.3).

- "flap" for alveolar flaps [ɾ], (e.g. [ˈdoktoɾ], [ˈɪmpoɾt]). Expectably (see 4.3.1), trills [r] did not appear in the corpus.
- the category "other" was established either for contexts in which it was too perceptually difficult to unambiguously decide about rhoticity, or certain very exceptional (and probably unintentional) articulations like uvular [ʁ] or labio-velar [w]. These instances were very rare and were excluded from the results.

We can subsume approximants and rhotic vowels under the label "rhotic – standard realisations," i.e. canonical realisations in the most widespread rhotic standard variety, GA (see Table 1). It is true that the distribution of approximants vs. rhotic vowels in the critical environments is conditioned by the position of /r/ within the target syllable (see 2.3, 6.1.1), but as explained in (6.1.1), the speakers occassionally and unpredictably shifted this position, and only the non-prevocalic character of the context is the crucial criterion for deciding about rhoticity or non-rhoticity and verification of the hypotheses (5). In opposition to this, alveolar flaps can be understood as "rhotic – non-standard realisation," since they are most likely to be a feature of Czech foreign accent in English, as explained in (4.3.2).

6.2.2 Prevocalic contexts in non-students of English

In order to investigate whether non-students of English pronounce flaps [ɾ] as /r/-realisation more often in non-prevocalic (i.e. pertaining to rhoticity) or prevocalic contexts, /r/ had to be analysed also in selected syllable-initial contexts in the recordings of the 8 speakers in group B (see 6.5.1).

35 contexts were chosen from the text (i.e. 280 contexts were actually analysed), in which /r/ appeared as the only consonant in the onset, e.g. *Russia*, *series, European*, etc. In other words, clusters with /r/ were excluded, not only to reduce the number of contexts, but also because coarticulation could influence the realisation of /r/, for example in /tr/ or /θr/ clusters, etc. (see 4.3.2) The same markings were used as in (6.2), but this time only approximants and flaps, since zero and vocalic realisations do not appear in syllabic onsets either in Czech or English.

6.3 Questionnaires

Short questionnaires (see Appendix 2) were filled in by each of the 24 speakers (see the answers in Appendix 3), in which they listed:

- their gender, age, region of origin, and mothertongue
- how long they had been learning English, and if they studied it at university
- their self-estimated level of proficiency in English (according to CEFR,[4] from A1 to C2), and other languages they could speak at C1/C2 level
- their preferred accent of English in terms of pleasantness, and the accent they strived to emulate (if any)
- if they had been taught English at elementary or secondary school by native speakers (and of what nationality), if they talked regularly to native speakers of English (and of what nationality), and in which English-speaking countries they had spent more than a month
- TV series they watched or had watched in English on a regular basis, possibly with Czech subtitles. 6 British and 6 American series were selected from the list of the most popular series on the Czech-Slovak film database,[5] but the respondents could also list other series.

6.4 Speakers and groups

6.4.1 Primary division

The 24 Czech speakers recorded were divided into the following groups:

- group A; university students of English (16 speakers)
- group B; non-students of English (8 speakers)

The average age in group A was 20,7 years (ranging from 19 to 25) and the average age in group B was 35 years (ranging from 20 to 59). As for the age at which they started learning English, the average was 8,3 years for group A (ranging from 4 to 12) and 19,8 years for group B (the extremes being 7 and 44).

In group A, the average level of English proficiency (based on the speakers´ own

4 available online at https://rm.coe.int/1680459f97
5 available at https://www.csfd.cz/zebricky/nejoblibenejsi-serialy/

estimations) was C1-C2, with exactly half of the speakers reckoning their level to be C1, and the other half C2.

In group B, the speakers mostly estimated their level as B2 (median), with the low extreme A2 and the high extreme B2-C1.

10 out of the 16 speakers in group A have spent more than one month in an English speaking country, 4 of them even in 2 different countries. As for group B, only 2 out of the 8 speakers have had this experience. Similarly, 9 of the university student admitted talking regularly to native speakers of English (only 2 in group B), and the same number of them had been instructed by a native English teacher at elementary or secondary school (also 2 in group B).

In conclusion, the students of English in group A are on average earlier-onset learners with higher level of proficiency and more exposure to native English. Given the subject of their studies, they are also likely to have more explicit knowledge about pronunciation and about the accents of English. On the other hand, the speakers in group B are less proficient, later-onset learners with less exposure to native English, and therefore more likely to be prone to transfer and to have a stronger foreign accent, including the transfer of rhoticity (see 5).

Among the 24 speakers, there were 20 women and only 4 men, which means no relevant conclusions can be based on the speakers´ gender.

6.4.2 Secondary division within group A

The group A was further subdivided based on the accent the speakers consciously attempted to emulate:

- group A-r; university students striving for a rhotic accent (6 speakers)
- group A-nr; university students striving for a non-rhotic accent (6 speakers)
- group A-in; university students without any particular model accent chosen (4 speakers)

In group A-r, all of the students have chosen GA (or simply American), with one exception – Irish English. Similarly, in group A-nr, all have chosen RP (or General British), except for one person attempting at "Geordie," i.e. a non-rhotic accent of North East England. In group A-in, 3 of the 4 speakers did not list any model

accent, and one was undecided between British and American.

Not surprisingly, most of the speakers (75%) in groups A-r + A-nr attempted to emulate the same accent they also found the most "pleasant" in aesthetic terms. In the "indecisive" group A-in, two speakers considered GA the most pleasant, and the other two RP.

Curiously enough, if the speakers in group A-nr had had a native speaker teacher at elementary or secondary school (4 of them had), he or she was American, not British. Experience with native teachers from the US was generally more common throughout the entire corpus; 10 speakers had an American or a Canadian teacher, only 2 had a British one, and nobody had a British teacher only. This is indicative of a strong American influence on the one hand, and contradictory to the preferrence of RP at Czech schools (see 4.1) on the other. Within this small corpus, GA even closely (11:10) "defeated" RP in pleasantness (see 4.2 for comparison).

Another interesting matter pertaining to the description of the groups is whether the students in groups A-r and A-nr demonstrated also other features of the accent they strived to emulate, apart from rhoticity. In order to investigate this, two characteristic oppositions between GA and RP (the target accents for 5/6 speakers in both of the respective groups) were selected, one vocalic and the other consonantal, and their presence in the students´ speech was tested perceptually on 6 (3+3) selected contexts from the text. The vocalic opposition was /ɒ/ (RP) vs. /ɑ/ (GA) in words *job*, *Congo* and *correspondent* from the text, i.e. the lexical set LOT in Wells (1982, 123). The consonantal opposition was /t/ (RP) vs. /ɾ/ (GA) in words *latest*, *let-up* (presupposes linking, which, however, should happen, given the proficiency of the speakers and the hyphenation in the script) and *sensitivity*. The GA innovation of flapping intervocalic /t/ is a relatively new phenomenon, having arisen as late as in the 20th century (MacMahon 1998, 486), but nowadays considered completely standard (Boberg 2015, 236). The results of this test see in Table 2.

The table shows noticeable inconsistencies in many speakers. Only two speakers in group A-r displayed majority (4 and more) of GA features, and this is true only if we acknowledge /d/ as a possible American alternative to /ɾ/ in these contexts,

which is very controversial.[6] The other two predominantly GA-sounding speakers were from groups A-in and A-nr, respectively. On the other hand, 5/6 of A-nr speakers sounded predominantly RP-like, and in the entire group of university students, British other-than-rhoticity features prevailed.

speaker	group	/ɒ/ vs. /ɑ/			/t/ vs. /ɾ/		
		job	*Congo*	*correspondent*	*latest*	*let-up*	*sensitivity*
A1	A-r	ɒ	ɒ	ɒ	ɾ	ɾ	ɾ
A9	A-r	ɒ	ɒ	ɒ	t	ɾ	t
A11	A-r	ɑ	ɒ	ɒ	d	ɾ	ɾ
A13	A-r	ɒ	ɒ	ɒ	t	ɾ	ɾ
A15	A-r	ɑ	ɑ	ɒ	t	ɾ	ɾ
A16	A-r	ɒ	ɒ	ə	t	t	t
A3	A-nr	ɒ	o	ɒ	t	ɾ	t
A5	A-nr	ɒ	ɒ	ɒ	t	t	t
A6	A-nr	ɑ	ə	ɒ	t	ɾ	t
A8	A-nr	ɒ	ɒ	ɒ	t	t	t
A10	A-nr	ɒ	ɒ	ɒ	t	t	t
A12	A-nr	ɑ	ɒ	ɒ	ɾ	ɾ	ɾ
A2	A-in	ɒ	ɒ	ɒ	t	t	t
A4	A-in	ɑ	ɒ	ɒ	d	ʔ	d
A7	A-in	ɒ	ɒ	ɒ	t	t	t
A14	A-in	ɑ	ɒ	ɑ	ɾ	ɾ	ɾ

Table 2: *Selected other-than-rhoticity accent features in speakers from group A. Blue colours indicate features pertaining to RP, red colours show GA features. Fainter shades mean the realisation is non-standard or Czech-accented.*

Since flaps were substantially more common than /ɑ/, and indeed appeared predominantly in group A-r, it can be speculated that the /ɒ/ vs. /ɑ/ opposition is primarily to blame for the inconsistencies. The sound in the contexts in question corresponds to *o* in ortography, and /ɒ/ is a vowel closer to Czech /o/, whereas /ɑ/

6 Both the sounds are voiced and have the same place of articulation, which is probably why British speakers tend to think that Americans pronounce /d/ instead of /t/; furthermore, intervocalic tapping can also affect the American /d/, which leads to homophony in certain cases; see (Wells 1982, 248-249). Czech learners could also re-interpret /ɾ/ as /d/ because Czech /d/ can indeed be flapped in less careful pronunciation (Machač 2017, 3).

is closer to Czech /a/. Therefore, the /ɒ/ pronunciation of *o* is inherently more natural for L1 Czech speakers. Similarly, the conventional realisation of intervocalic *t* as /t/ is common for both Czech and RP, and thus appeared generally more frequently than the intervocalic flapped /t/.

7. Results

The first part of this section (7.1) will focus on the general proportions of rhoticity in all of the target contexts, with respect to the individual groups. In the second part (7.2), the target contexts will be subdivided on the basis of their further specification, i.e. regarding factors such as stress or position within syllables. In the third part (7.3), the realisation of rhoticity in group B (non-students) will be examined, based on the distinction between standard and non-standard realisations (see 6.2.1). Finally, the fourth part (7.4) will address individual tendencies of the speakers in the corpus, relating rhoticity to the information listed in the questionnaires.

After the exclusion of the contexts with linking, critically mispronounced words (see 6.1.2), and the category evaluated as "other" (see 6.2.1), 1724 target contexts (out of the 1776 potential) constitute the data statistically analysed.

7.1 General rhoticity

As apparent from the bar graph in Figure 1, group B (non-students) is significantly more rhotic than all the other groups, even more than A-r (students striving for a rhotic accent). In A-r, the proportion of rhoticity is significantly higher than in both A-in and A-nr, but the difference between A-in and A-nr is not statistically significant, as there is a small overlap between the confidence intervals.

The hypothesis (see 5) that A-nr would be consistently non-rhotic has been confirmed, since the confidence interval is entirely below 50%. Similarly, group A-r is indeed predominantly rhotic, and more consistent than A-nr, as the confidence interval is further from 50% in the rhotic group than in the non-rhotic one. The most consistent of all the four groups is B. On the other hand, the most inconsistent group is A-in, which does not seem to prefer rhoticity or non-rhoticity, as the confidence interval ranges both below and above the threshold. Therefore, the hypothesis that A-in would be mostly rhotic has not been confirmed.

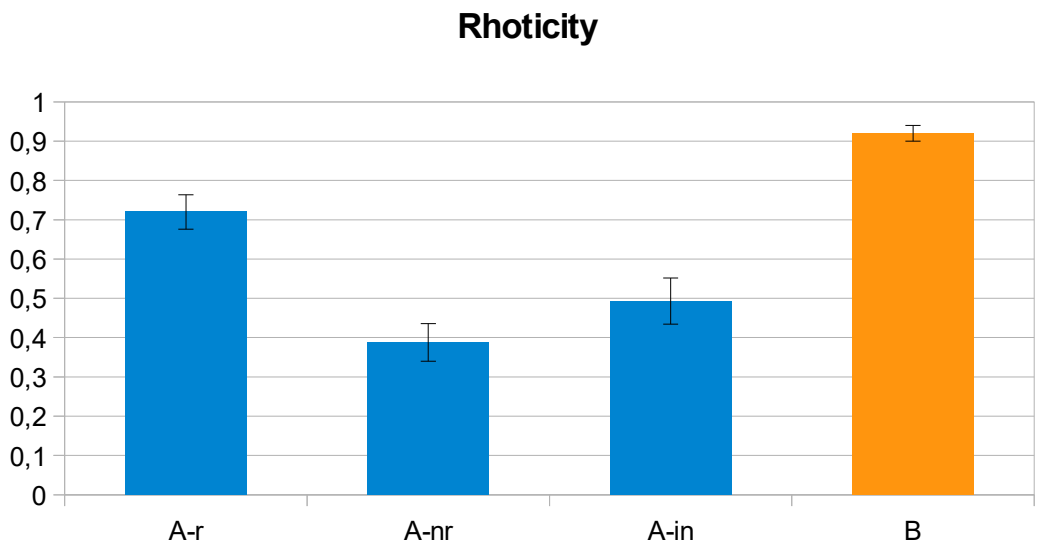

Figure 1: *% of rhoticity: all contexts (groups)*

7.2 Rhoticity in contexts

Before we address rhoticity as influenced by lexical stress and other factors, it has to be mentioned that the statistical analysis deals with contexts which have been partially reclassified according to the actual realisation by the speakers (see 6.1.1); therefore, a syllable treated as stressed here may be unstressed in canonical pronunciation, and vice versa. Similarly, the category "position within syllable" corresponds to the realisation, e.g. the full form of *for* /fɔːr/ is a coda context, but /fə˞/ is understood as a syllabic nucleus, which is an unpredictable distribution; hence the unequal number of these contexts even between the two groups of the same size, A-r and A-nr (the other factor influencing this being the excluded data).

Figure 2 shows that in groups A-nr and A-in there were no statistically significant differences in terms of rhoticity between stressed and unstressed syllables. However, in both of the predominantly rhotic groups, A-r and B, stressed syllables were significantly more rhotic than unstressed ones (albeit the difference between the upper and the lower endpoints of the respective confidence intervals was only 0,4% in group B). The succession of the groups remains the same even if the factor of stress is applied.

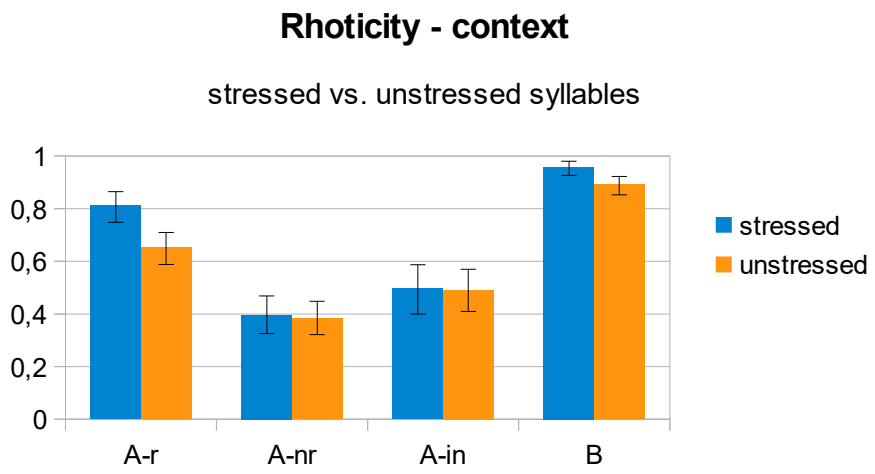

Figure 2: *% of rhoticity: lexical stress (groups)*

In terms of the distribution of rhoticity in syllabic codas vs. syllabic nuclei (Figure 3), there was a statistically significant difference between these two contexts only in group B, and the span between the confidence intervals was very small even here (0,35%). Groups A-r and A-in also displayed insignificantly more rhoticity in codas, which could lead up to a speculation about Czech learners´ tendency towards less rhoticity in syllabic nuclei. Figure 4 shows that in the entire corpus, i.e. both students and non-students, syllabic codas were indeed significantly more rhotic than syllabic nuclei. Nonetheless, confirmation of this assumption for the individual groups would require a larger corpus.

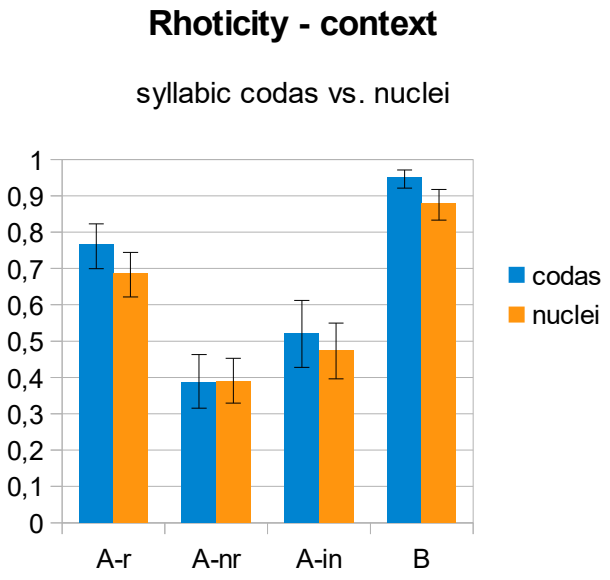

Figure 3: *% of rhoticity: position in syllable (groups)*

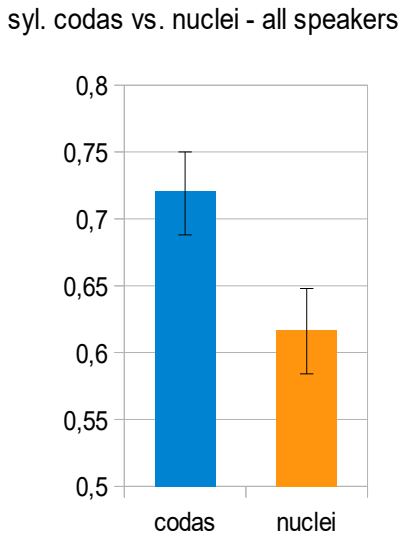

Figure 4: *(all speakers)*

The criteria of the target contexts´ positions within words (final vs. non-final syllables) and of their preconsonantal or non-preconsonantal positions did not bring any statistically significant results for any of the groups whatsoever. Let us therefore combine the two factors which showed at least some significance, i.e. stress and position in syllable; this provides us with the same four categories distinguished in (6.1.1), only with the difference that those pertained to the canonical distribution in the text read.

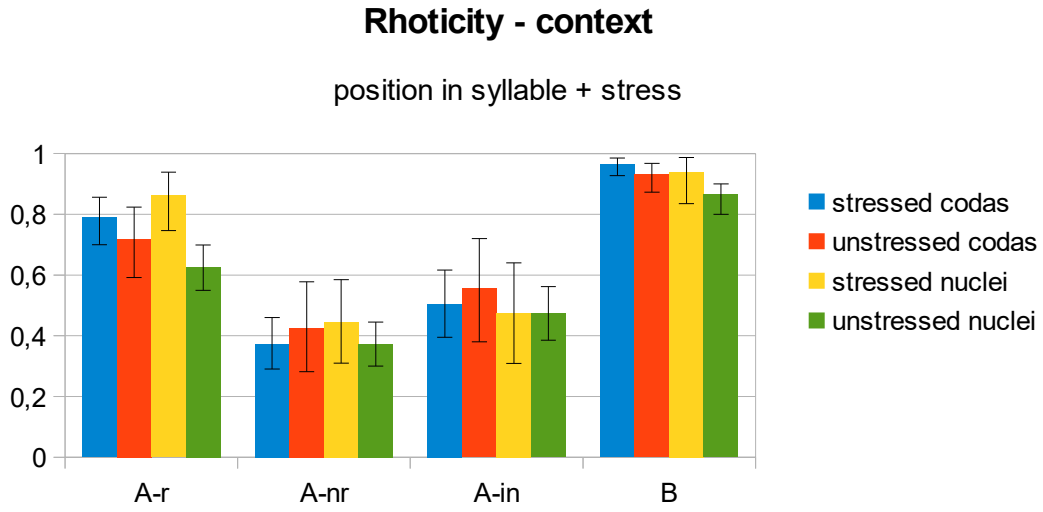

Figure 5: *% of rhoticity: position in syllable + lexical stress (groups)*

The most declarative result apparent from Figure 5 is that group A-r was significantly more rhotic in stressed syllabic nuclei than in unstressed syllabic nuclei. In B, the other predominantly rhotic group, unstressed nuclei also seem to be the least rhotic context; however, the only relevant conclusion for group B can be based on the comparison with stressed codas, where non-students were significantly more rhotic than in unstressed nuclei. Apart from that, it appears that the unstressed nuclei were also the context most prone to inconsistency in both of the distinctly rhotic groups, with the respective confidence intervals closest to 50%.

If we examine these four categories in the entire corpus (Figure 6), we can see that the unstressed nucleus is indeed the least rhotic context, significantly less rhotic than both types of codas, stressed or unstressed. This could indicate that Czech learners are most likely to be non-rhotic in words such as /ˈgʌvəmənt/ and /ˈoʊvə/

(these were the two most common words within this category). However, a larger and more ballanced corpus would be needed to demonstrate this persuasively.

As aparent from most of the graphs above, it also seems that variation of the different factors has got more influence on rhoticity in groups A-r and B, whilst groups A-nr and A-in remain relatively inert, as the differences are always very insignificant.

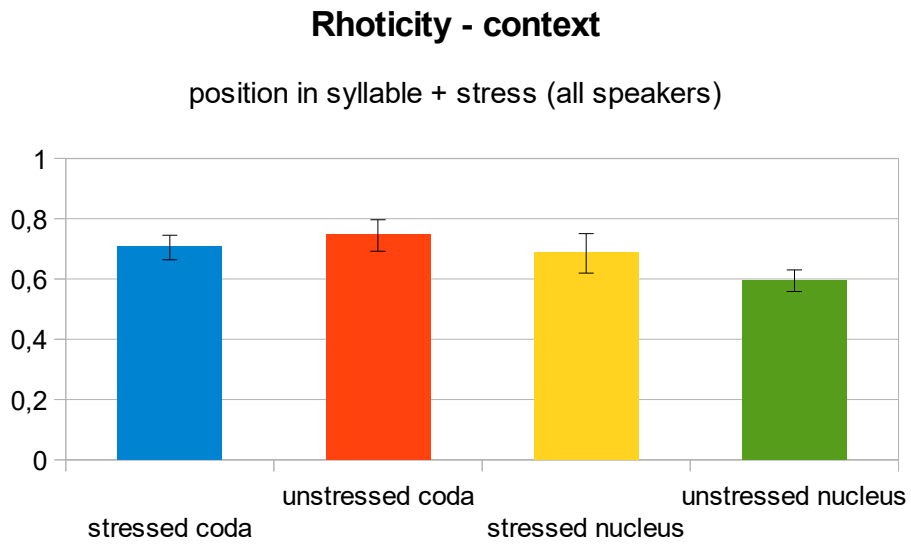

Figure 6: *% of rhoticity: position in syllable + lexical stress (entire corpus)*

7.3 Realisation of rhoticity

We shall distinguish between two categories, standard (approximants and rhotic vowels) and non-standard (alveolar flaps) realisations of the rhotic contexts, with respect to the most widespread rhotic variety – GA, as already mentioned in (6.2.1). Given that the number of non-standard, flapped /r/ pronounced by university students in the target contexts is negligible (only 4 such cases appeared in group A, out of 619 rhotic contexts), the realisation has been analysed only for group B.

Figure 7 shows that in total, flaps constituted about 10% (the confidence interval being between 7,9 and 13,3%) of all the rhotic pronunciations in non-students. Such number is not surprising, given that the non-students estimated their proficiency level to be quite advanced (mostly B2), and it roughly corresponds to the findings of Rumlová (2018), who reports about 15% of non-standard

realisations of /r/ (even though listed as "trills," and not specifically in rhotic contexts) in 10 strongly Czech-accented female speakers (Rumlová 2018, 41).

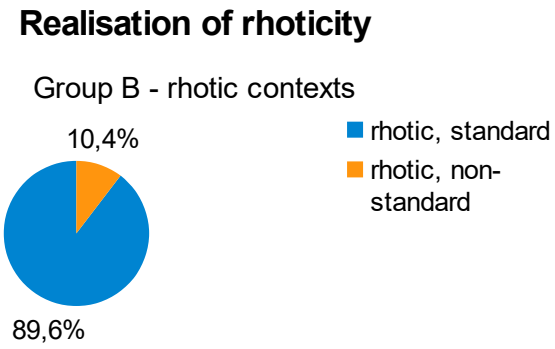

Figure 7: *% of approximants + rhotic vowels vs. % of alveolar flaps: rhotic contexts (group B)*

If we further examine the dependence of the standardness of realisation on different factors, position within syllable seems to be the only factor manifesting any statistically significant influence, as apparent from Figure 8. Alveolar flaps appeared more often in syllabic codas (e.g. [ˈɪntɛrvju:]) than in nuclei (i.e. Czech syllabic /r/, as in [ˈmɪnɪstr̩]). Additional combinations of the factors did not bring any significant results.

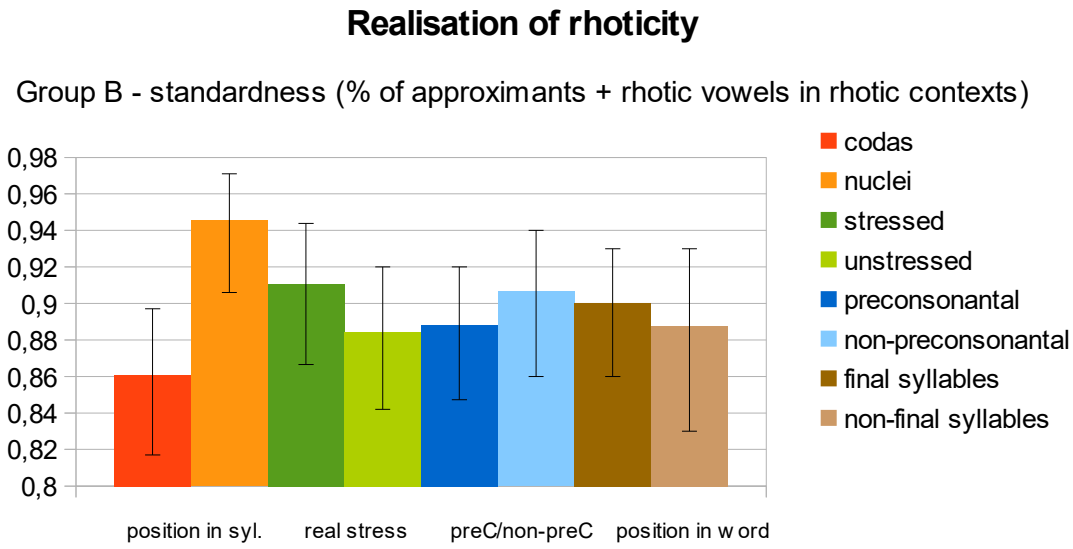

Figure 8: *% of approximants + rhotic vowels: rhotic contexts (group B).*
syl. = *syllable.* real stress = *lexical stress as actually pronounced by the speakers.*
preC = *preconsonantal*.

Let us now proceed to the comparison of the proportion of flaps in the target, i.e. non-prevocalic contexts with the proportion of flaps in syllabic onsets (only if /r/

did not consitute a part of a cluster). As shown in Figure 9, alveolar flaps in onsets appeared roughly in 16% of the 280 contexts analysed, which would correspond even more to the number mentioned by Rumlová (2018). However, the difference is not statistically significant, because there is an overlap of 0,7% between the confidence intervals. Thus, the hypothesis that non-standard realisations of /r/ would be produced by non-students more often in syllabic onsets than in non-prevocalic positions has not been confirmed.

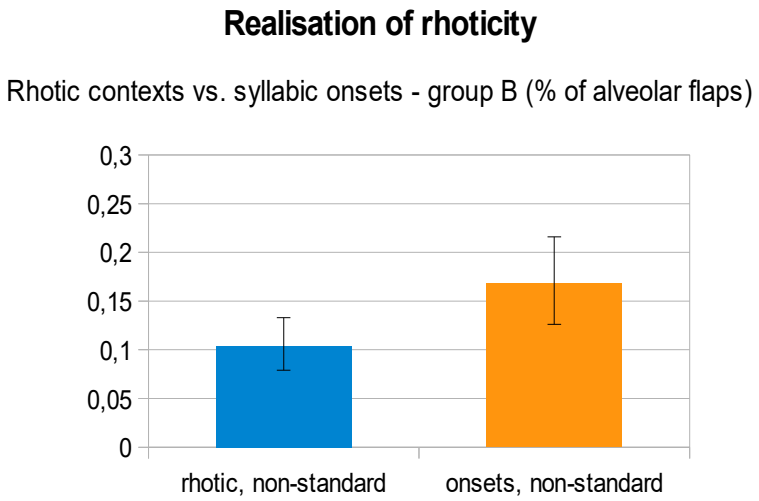

Figure 9: *% of alveolar flaps: rhotic contexts vs. syllabic onsets (group B)*

7.4 Individual tendencies

Of the 24 speakers recorded (Figure 10), 6 speakers are distinctly non-rhotic (the confidence interval for rhoticity was below 50%), 16 are distinctly rhotic, and only 2 are inconsistent (the confidence interval and 50% intersect). Furthermore, in as many as 19 speakers, the closer endpoints of the confidence interval (i.e. the upper extreme for non-rhotic and the lower one for rhotic speakers) are further than 25% from the bisection, and in 14 speakers even further than 30%, which indicates a remarkable consistency of most speakers throughout the corpus.

7.4.1 Individual rhoticity and groups

Expectably, all the speakers from group B are significantly rhotic. This explains why non-students ranked so high in general rhoticity (see 7.1), and why they were also the most consistent group. All the distinctly non-rhotic speakers were students of English (from group A).

As for the two significantly inconsistent speakers, one is from group A-r and the other from group A-nr, which were both of identical size; therefore, these two speakers lowered the consistency rates in those groups, but at least more or less equally. The four-member group A-in (students without any model accent chosen), then, consisted of 2 distinctly rhotic and 2 distinctly non-rhotic speakers. This explains why the group as a whole was so inconsistent, and why their collective rhoticity rate was so close to 50%; it was not due to inconsistencies on the level of the individual speakers, but due to the structure of the group.

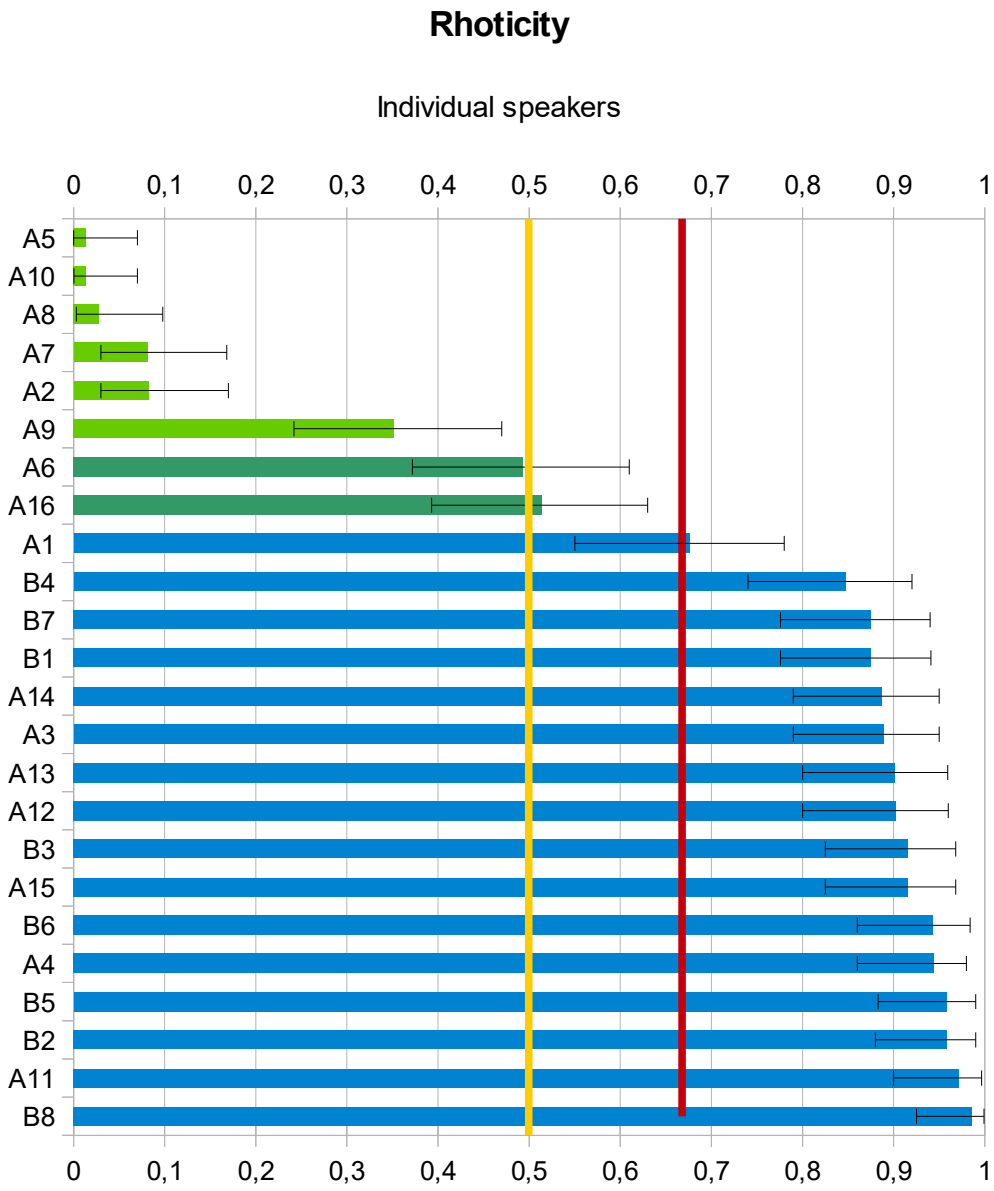

Figure 10: *% of rhoticity: all contexts (individual speakers). The yellow line marks 50%. The red line marks average % of rhoticity in the entire corpus.*

Group A-nr consisted of 3 non-rhotic, 2 rhotic and 1 inconsistent speaker, which explains why this group was less consistent than A-r, in which there were 4 rhotic, 1 inconsistent and surprisingly (see below) also 1 non-rhotic speaker.

7.4.2 Individual rhoticity and the most pleasant accent

Let us now observe the relations between individual speakers´ rhoticity and the accents of English they found the most pleasant. All of the significantly non-rhotic speakers also preferred a non-rhotic accent in aesthetic terms (RP or Geordie), with one remarkable and curious exception – a student who prefers GA, and also strives to emulate it (i.e. from group A-r), but who is distinctly non-rhotic, although the least consistent one of all the non-rhotic speakers.

If students of English were significantly rhotic, they also voted GA to be the most pleasant accent. The rhotic speakers who preferred RP (4 speakers) were all non-students.

As concerns the two markedly inconsistent speakers and their favourite accent, the answer is rather curious; both of them (and only them) listed Scottish English as the most pleasant accent, which is also the only significant item from the questionnaires these two students noticeably seem to share. This finding is especially interesting in the light of the recent trend towards semi-rhoticity in Scottish English (Cruttenden 2014, 89).

7.4.3 Individual rhoticity and other factors

Nationality of the native speakers that the respondents regularly talked to does not show any perspicuous influence. On the other hand, visits to English speaking countries longer than one month do; 5 of the 6 non-rhotic speakers had spent more than a month in the United Kingdom (one of them in the USA as well, and this was the least consistent one). In comparison, only a half (4/8) of the significantly rhotic students of English had spent more than a month in the USA.

As for the TV series that the speakers watched regularly with the original English sound, the results are not very revealing. 21 out of the 24 speakers watched both British and American series. We can at least state that majority (9/16) of the distinctly rhotic speakers watched more than 4 series in American English, and the same number of them watched more American series than British series.

7.4.4 Individual non-students and realisation

Figure 11 shows the individual tendencies of speakers in group B in terms of /r/-realisation; this time in all the contexts where /r/ appeared, i.e. both rhotic target contexts and syllabic onsets. It is apparent that alveolar flaps (the Czech-accented, non-standard pronunciation) appeared predominantly in two speakers only; one of them even flapped about a half of all /r/ in the contexts analysed. These two speakers are the oldest persons in the entire corpus (59 and 47 years), and they are also the two latest-onset learners (started at 44 and 26 years, respectively). The oldest and latest-onset speaker was also the one to have listed the lowest estimated level of proficiency (A2).

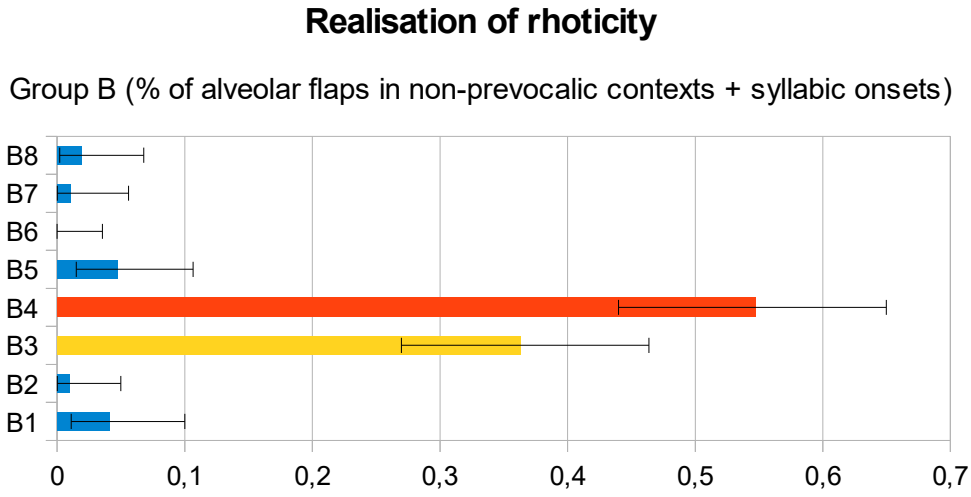

Figure 11: *% of alveolar flaps: rhotic contexts vs. syllabic onsets (individual speakers in group B)*

This seems to confirm that speakers more prone to transfer (see 4.3.3) are also more likely to realise English /r/ non-standardly, i.e. in a Czech-accented manner. The other speakers in group B flapped /r/ rather exceptionally, and one of them did not even once; this was also the speaker who estimated herself as the most proficient one in this group (B2-C1). It seems as if the younger intermediate learners, already born to the world of globally culturally dominant English, had more exposure to the sounds of it (from songs, films, etc.), and therefore were less inclinable to the transfer of them, but not quite so for the deeper, underlying phonemic structures.

8. Discussion

The hypothesis that group A-in would be mostly rhotic was not confirmed, as the specific structure of the group caused its collective inconsistency. Also, it was not confirmed that alveolar flaps as realisation would appear more frequently in syllabic onsets than in non-prevocalic positions in group B, because the difference was not statistically significant, although there was a strong tendency. The other hypotheses (see 5) have been confirmed.

The results of this research show primarily that rhoticity is indeed typical of Czech accent in English. If a L1 Czech speaker wishes to speak in a non-rhotic manner, he or she apparently has to be very proficient, with a lot of exposure to native English, and ideally even to have spent some considerable time in a non-rhotic English speaking country. In the light of this, the pursuit of a non-rhotic accent as the pronunciation model for production in Czech TEFL classrooms does not seem to be meaningful. This is, however, not to say conclusively that GA should be the model accent, as it obviously has got other features that Czech learners might find problematic (see 6.4.2).[7]

On the other hand, the standard realisation of /r/ as an approximant or a rhotic vowel does not seem to pose serious difficulties even to intermediate learners, be it in non-prevocalic or prevocalic contexts, unless they are older, late-onset learners. Therefore I would suggest that in the case of rhoticity, the transfer of the underlying phonemic structures operates as a factor considerably stronger than the transfer of the surface phonetic realisation.

Curiously enough, it seems as if proficiency decreased consistency, as far as rhoticity is concerned. The non-students were all very consistent in their rhoticity, whereas the students of English appeared to be significantly less consistent; not only if they strived to be non-rhotic (which would not be surprising), but even if they strived for a rhotic accent. It can be speculated that mere awarness of the existence of non-rhoticity lowers consistency, given that the accent-conscious students have to make a decision between the two possibilites, whereas the less

7 But in today´s globalised world, under the massive cultural influence of the USA (23 of the 24 speakers watched some American TV series regularly, 1/4 of them had been to the USA, GA prevailed over RP in pleasantness, etc.), the alleged geo-cultural pre-relevance of British English to European learners is certainly not undisputable any more.

advanced learners may simply not know that *r* in spelling does not necessarily have to be pronounced in the critical contexts. Unfortunately, no such category as "awarness of accent features" has been tested by the questionnaires.

The results also moderately suggest that Czech learners tend to be more rhotic in syllabic codas, i.e. post-vocalically, and less rhotic in syllabic nuclei, especially in unstressed ones; there is a noticeable trend, at least. This could be possibly related to the principle of minimising articulatory effort, because /r/ in nuclei, e.g. in words like *government* or *persuade*, creates "consonant clusters" more often.[8] It can be also guessed that it may be a phenomenon somewhat similar to R dissimilation in GA, which occurs in unstressed non-final syllables (Wells 1982, 490). Nonetheless, as has been already mentioned, additional experiments including a larger and more ballanced corpus would be necessary to make any relevant conclusions about how Czech learners´ rhoticity varies under these specific circumstances.

As for further research in this area, it might be also very interesting to examine rhoticity of L1 Czech teachers of English at elementary or secondary schools (i.e. not current students of TEFL, but people having already worked as teachers for some time), in order to see what pronunciation model the Czech pupils actually receive, and how consistent the teachers are in producing the model accent. Not too unlikely, it could be some "mildly Czech-accented rhotic (or semi-rhotic) RP" that actually prevails in the teachers´ speech.

8 It is dubious to speak about "consonant clusters" if there is a rhotic vowel, but the tip of the tongue still has to be raised in [ɝː] or [ɚ], unlike in mid central vowels that are non-rhotic.

9. Conclusion

This thesis focused on the variability of rhoticity in L1 Czech learners of L2 English, both university students of English and non-students of English. It dealt with rhoticity in phonological terms, as well as with the phonetic realisation of /r/. Rhoticity is a distinct and readily recognisable feature of every accent of English, and therefore the description of Czech learners´ tendencies in this specific aspect might contribute to creating a more comprehensive image of contemporary Czech foreign accent in English.

The theoretical part of this thesis described the phenomenon of rhoticity in English on both the phonemic and the phonetic level. It outlined rhoticity´s status within contemporary accents of English, and briefly summarised its historical development and its sociolinguistic importance. Finally, it addressed the current accent-preferences in TEFL, especially Czech language classrooms, and the issues Czech learners might experience with rhoticity in relation to their mothertongue.

The research part examined rhoticity in 24 Czech speakers of English, 16 students and 8 non-students, who were recorded reading the same text in English. The auditory analysis of their speech focused on the presence or absence of rhoticity and its respective phonetic realisation in 74 target contexts. In addition to this, all the speakers filled in a questionnaire, in which they listed information pertaining to their experience, accent-preferences, and exposure to native English.

The results revealed that less advanced Czech speakers of English tended to be significantly rhotic, but generally able to pronounce the rhotic contexts in a standard manner. Rhoticity in students of English mostly corresponded to their accent-preference, both to the most pleasant accent and to their model accent, although they were less consistent than non-students. Further research was suggested in the area of specific factors influencing rhoticity, and also concerning variability of rhoticity of L1 Czech English teachers at primary and secondary schools.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

BBC news with Marianne Marshall. The leaders of Russia and the United States have signed an agreement in Moscow to reduce the nuclear warheads on their missiles by two thirds. President Bush said a new chapter has been opened in relationship between the two countries. The European Union welcomed it as a step forward in disarmament for the whole world. Nikolaj Gorshkov reports from Moscow.

The Pakistani government said it is carrying out short and medium range missile tests over the next four days. The tests, which come at a time of extreme tension between India and Pakistan, have been dismissed by India as a domestic political stunt. The Pakistani President has said in a BBC interview that he does not want war with India over Kashmir and hopes the United States might mediate. The US Secretary of State Collin Powell has been speaking by telephone to both governments. He said the situation was very dangerous and he hoped to persuade both sides to take a step back.

The latest in the series of UN reports on the plunder of resources in the Democratic Republic of Congo says there has been no let-up in the illegal expropriation of Congo's natural wealth. Everything from diamonds to animal skins is being stolen. Our UN correspondent Greg Barrow reports.

You are listening to the news from the BBC in London.

The Ethiopian authorities say they have no confidence in the commander in charge of the United Nations peace-keeping troops stationed along the border with Eritrea. Ethiopia's deputy foreign minister, doctor Takeda Alemu, told the BBC that General Paul Khammad, who commands four thousand two hundred peace-keeping troops, lacked the prudence, wisdom and sensitivity necessary for the job. Ethiopia reacted strongly last month after the United Nations took journalists to a disrupted border town from its headquarters in Eritrea.

The German government is to hold a meeting to try to calm public anger over price rises that have occurred since the introduction of the European single currency. It says some unscrupulous traders have marked up prices, capitalizing on the public's unfamiliarity with the euro when it came into circulation on the first of January. Patrick Bartlett reports.

The parliament in Finland has voted to build a new nuclear power plant making Finland the first West European country to approve such a plan in more than a decade. The government says more atomic energy is needed to reduce dependence on energy imports from Russia. Critics say Finland should follow the lead of countries like Germany and Sweden in phasing out nuclear power altogether.

A sixty-six-year old man Mario Curness has become the oldest man to have climbed Mount Everest. The China-Tibet Mountaineering Association said Mr. Curness, who's from Italy, beat the record set last week.

BBC news.

Appendix 1: *The text read by the speakers recorded.*

Appendix 2

Pohlaví: _____ **Region (kraj) původu: _____**

Věk: _____ **Rodný jazyk: _____**

Kolik let se učíte anglicky: _____

Studujete angličtinu jako obor na VŠ? _____

Ke které úrovni angličtiny (podle Společného evropského referenčního rámce) byste se zařadil/a? *(zakroužkujte)*

A1 (začátečník) **A2** (mírně pokročilý) **B1** (středně pokročilý) **B2** (pokročilý)

C1 (zkušený uživatel) **C2** (profesionální uživatel)

Jakými dalšími jazyky mluvíte na úrovni C1/C2? _____

Který z následujících akcentů angličtiny je Vám nejpříjemnější?

britský (standardní, RP) kanadský

americký (standardní, GA) skotský

australský jiný: _____

Snažíte se v AJ vědomě napodobovat některý z těchto akcentů? (který?)

_____

Pokud Vás na ZŠ/SŠ vyučovali rodilí mluvčí angličtiny, jaké byli národnosti?

_____

Hovoříte-li pravidelně s rodilými mluvčími AJ, jaké jsou národnosti?

_____

Ve kterých angl. mluvících zemích jste byl/a alespoň po dobu 1 měsíce?

_____

Sledujete (nyní/dříve) některé z následujících seriálů v původním znění či s titulky?

Friends (Přátelé) IT Crowd (Ajťáci)

Game of Thrones (Hra o trůny) Black Books (Černá kniha)

Red Dwarf (Červený trpaslík) Dr. House

The Simpsons (Simpsonovi) How I Met Your Mother (Jak jsem poznal vaši matku)

Sherlock The Big Bang Theory (Teorie velkého třesku)

Breaking Bad (Perníkový táta) Doctor Who

jiné (až 5 dalších):

_____

Appendix 2: *The questionnaire filled in by the speakers.*

Appendix 3

spea-ker	sex	age	region	length of learning	estim. level	other C1/C2	pleasant acc.	model acc.	native teachers	native speakers	>1 mth. in ES countries	series watched in E (or with subtitles)
A1	F	21	Prague	11 years	C1	---	GA	GA	---	---	---	5 Br, 5 Am
A2	F	19	N. Boh.	10 years	C2	---	RP	---	---	---	GB	1 Br, 1 Am, 1 Can
A3	F	19	Prague	11 years	C1	---	GA	RP	---	GB, USA, Sc.	USA	3 Br, 6 Am
A4	F	20	S. Boh.	10 years	C1	---	GA	---	---	---	GB, USA	2 Br, 4 Am
A5	M	21	W. Boh.	10 years	C1	---	Geordie	Geordie	---	---	---	4 Br, 4 Am
A6	F	20	Prague	10 years	C2	Croatian	Scottish	RP	USA	GB, USA	Scotland	1 Br, 2 Am
A7	F	20	Prague	13 years	C1	French	RP	---	USA	GB, USA	GB	2 Br, 2 Am
A8	F	20	Prague	8 years	C2	---	RP	RP	USA	GB	GB	4 Br, 5 Am
A9	F	23	Silesia	18 years	C1	---	GA	GA	USA	---	GB, USA	3 Br, 2 Am
A10	F	20	Prague	---	C2	---	RP	RP	USA	GB, USA	GB	7 Br, 4 Am
A11	F	20	Prague	13 years	C2	French	GA	GA	GB, USA	GB, USA, Ir., Can., NZ, Aus.	USA, Can.	4 Br, 7 Am
A12	F	19	Prague	10 years	C1	---	RP	RP	USA	---	----	2 Br, 4 Am
A13	F	24	Prague	20 years	C2	---	GA	GA	GB, USA	USA	GB, USA	7 Br, 4 Am
A14	F	20	C. Boh.	12 years	C1	---	GA	GA+RP	---	---	---	6 Br, 4 Am
A15	M	20	Prague	13 years	C2	---	GA	GA	USA	GB, USA	---	7 Br, 3 Am
A16	F	25	E. Mor.	17 years	C2	French	Scottish	Ir.	---	USA	---	5 Br, 5 Am
B1	F	30	C. Boh.	22 years	B2	---	RP	RP	---	---	---	1 Br, 2 Am
B2	F	27	Prague	4 years	B1	---	GA	GA	Can.	USA	---	2 Br, 4 Am
B3	M	59	C. Boh.	15 years	A2	---	RP	---	---	---	---	3 Am
B4	F	47	S. Boh.	21 years	B2	German, Russian	RP	RP	---	---	---	2 Br, 1 Am
B5	F	27	S. Boh.	10 years	B2	German	RP	---	---	---	---	2 Am
B6	.F	40	Prague	20 years	B2-C1	German	RP	RP	---	GB	---	---
B7	M	20	Prague	13 years	B2	---	GA	GA	Indian	---	USA	2 Br, 2 Am
B8	F	30	Silesia	17 years	B2	---	GA	---	---	---	Scotland	3 Br, 6 Am

Appendix 3: *Answers from the questionnaires.*
A = *student of English,* B = *non-student.* E = *English.* GA = *General American.* RP = *Received Pronunciation.* C. = *Central.* E. = *Eastern.* N. = *Northern.* S= *Southern.* W = *Western.* Boh. = *Bohemia.* Mor. = *Moravia.*
length of learning = *for how long the respondent had been learning English.*
other C1/C2 = *other languages the respondent could speak at C1/C2 level.*
estim. level = *the level of proficiency in English according to Common European Framework of Reference the respondent estimated him/herself to have reached.*
pleasant acc. = *the most pleasant accent of English according to the respondent.*
native teachers = *nationality of native teachers of English that had instructed the respondent at secondary or elementary school.*
native speakers = *nationality of native speakers of English the respondent regularly talked to.*
> 1 mth. in ES countries = *the English speaking countries in which the respondent had spent more than one month.*
If the respondents were supposed to list only one answer and listed more, the first one was counted in.
All the respondents´ mothertongue is Czech.